

Message Text

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71

ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9837

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, GY

SUBJECT: INITIAL STAGE OF NATIONAL SERVICE TO BEGIN SOON

REF: GEORGETOWN 1871, DECEMBER 12, 1973

1. SUMMARY: PLANS FOR IMPLEMENTING INITIAL STAGES OF NATIONAL SERVICE (A CIVILIAN WORK CORPS) IN GUYANA ARE NEARING COMPLETION WITH CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS TO SERVE IN PIONEER CORPS. FROM DISCUSSION WITH MEMBER OF NATIONAL SERVICE SECRETARIAT, IT APPEARS PROGRAM WILL BE LIMITED IN BEGINNING. ONLY FIVE HUNDRED TO ONE THOUSAND VOLUNTEERS WILL BE ACCEPTED IN PIONEER CORPS AND ANY FORM OF COMPULSORY SERVICE IS ADMITTED ORGANIZATIONAL IMPOSSIBILITY. DEBATE AMONG GUYANESE ON NATIONAL SERVICE, HOWEVER, GOES BEYOND REALITY OF RELATIVELY MODEST PROGRAM AND, WITH RACIAL AND POLITICAL OVERTONES, IS CONCERNED WITH SYMBOLIC MEANING OF NATIONAL SERVICE FOR FUTURE OF GUYANA. END SUMMARY.

2. PLANS FOR IMPLEMENTING FIRST STAGES OF PRIME MINISTER FORBES BURNHAM'S PLANS FOR NATIONAL SERVICE ARE NEARING COMPLETION. DURING FIRST WEEK IN JUNE, LOCAL PRESS CARRIED ADS CALLING FOR PERSONS TO VOLUNTEER FOR PIONEER CORPS. AS OUTLINED IN GOVT WHITE
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PAPER LAST DECEMBER (REFTEL), PIONEER CORPS WILL CONSIST OF

YOUTHS AGES FOURTEEN TO TWENTY-FIVE WHO WILL RECEIVE INSTRUCTION IN COOPERATIVES, AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL SKILLS, VALUES OF COOPERATIVE REPUBLIC AS WELL AS SOME MILITARY TRAINING. MEANWHILE PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM CONTINUES TO STATE PUBLICLY THAT NATIONAL SERVICE WILL BE VOLUNTARY, ALTHOUGH HE STRESSES IT IS OPPORTUNITY NOT TO BE MISSED.

3. IN DISCUSSION OF NATIONAL SERVICE WITH OSCAR EDWARDS, MEMBER OF NATIONAL SERVICE SECRETARIAT, EMBOFF LEARNED FURTHER DETAILS OF INTRODUCTION OF PROGRAM. ACCORDING TO EDWARDS, GOVT EXPECTS TO PRESENT THIS MONTH TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY LEGISLATION IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL SERVICE WHITE PAPER. EDWARDS SAID PIONEER CORPS WOULD BEGIN WITH INITIAL INTAKE OF FIVE HUNDRED TO ONE THOUSAND YOUTHS DEPENDING ON LOGISTICAL CAPABILITY. HE ADMITTED THAT KIMBIA, NEAR BERBICE RIVER, IS ONLY SITE NOW READY TO ACCOMMODATE PARTICIPANTS IN PROGRAM. EDWARDS FURTHER SAID SECRETARIAT HAS BEEN SURPRISED SO FAR BY NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS, INCLUDING GUYANESE OF BOTH AFRICAN AND EAST INDIAN DESCENT. AFTER JULY 1ST DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS, ALL VOLUNTEERS WILL BE GIVEN APTITUDE TEST. THOSE VOLUNTEERS ACCEPTED IN FIRST STAGES OF PIONEER CORPS, EDWARDS SAID, WILL BE UNEMPLOYED WHO SHOW SOME SKILL IN TEST. ALTHOUGH WHITE PAPER STATES PIONEER CORPS IS ONLY GROUP TO EVENTUALLY BE COMPULSORY, EDWARDS FRANKLY ADMITTED SUCH STEP IS "IMPOSSIBLE" NOW, EVEN IF GOVT WANTED TO DO SO. EDWARDS BELIEVES SERVICE IN PIONEER CORPS WILL BE COMPULSORY ONLY IN DISTANT FUTURE.

4. PLANS FOR IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS FOR OTHER AGE GROUPS ARE ALSO PROCEEDING. EDWARDS SAID YOUNG BRIGADE (PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN) WILL START IN OCTOBER WHEN SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS. TRAINING WILL BE DONE IN LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND PARTICIPATION IN "VACATION CAMPS" WILL BE VOLUNTARY. SPECIAL SERVICE CORPS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND THOSE WITH SPECIAL SKILLS IS ALSO DUE TO BEGIN SOON. SUCH SPECIAL SERVICE VOLUNTEERS WILL BE ASKED TO SERVE TWO MONTHS EVERY FIVE YEARS. EDWARDS ESTIMATED TOTAL COST OF NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM FOR THIS YEAR AT \$(G)6,000,000.

5. COMMENT: CURRENT PLANS TO IMPLEMENT NATIONAL SERVICE, CONDITIONED BY ORGANIZATIONAL AND ECONOMIC REALITIES, REPRESENT CONSIDERABLE SCALING DOWN OF INITIAL OBJECTIVES. IN NEAR AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MEDIUM TERM FUTURE, NATIONAL SERVICE WILL HARDLY BE DEVICE FOR TRANSFORMING GUYANA INTO SELF-RELIANT AND DISCIPLINED NATION AS PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM CLAIMS, NOR WILL IT BE MEANS OF REPRESSION AND BRAINWASHING AS OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY AND CHEDDI JAGAN MAINTAIN. PROBLEM IS, HOWEVER, NATIONAL SERVICE HAS BECOME SYMBOL OF DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF GUYANA'S FUTURE. TO MOST EAST INDIANS AND MUCH OF MIDDLE CLASS IT REPRESENTS GROWING AFRICANIZATION OF GUYANESE SOCIETY AND LOSS OF INDIVIDUAL

FREEDOMS. TO PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM AND SOME OF HIS AFRO-GUYANESE FOLLOWERS, NATIONAL SERVICE REPRESENTS NEED TO SACRIFICE WELL BEING OF INDIVIDUAL FOR SUCCESS, IF NOT SURVIVAL, OF NATION. ALTHOUGH NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM ITSELF THEN MAY BE LIMITED, IT HAS STIRRED BASIC DEBATE OVER FUTURE OF GUYANESE SOCIETY. KREBS

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